



**CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN'S NETWORK FOR
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS**

Warsaw, 18-03-2009

Mr. Robert MADELIN
Director General
European Commission
DG SANCO
Rue Froissart 101
B – 1040 Brussels

Dear Mr. Director General,

I am writing to you on behalf of ASTRA Network in order to thank you for invitation to participate in the Sexual Health Forum last Friday and to express our willingness to further contribute to the debate on sexual health strategy for youth of Europe. We call on you to include a demand that the whole of Europe works towards ensuring access to reproductive health supplies and services for all youth in the policy paper on sexual health of young people.

ASTRA is a regional network for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe. Our aim is to raise awareness about women's health and reproductive choices and to build capacity, knowledge and experience of the societies and to improve policy standards in this respect. ASTRA is monitoring and reporting the status of implementation of gender-related policies on European Union level. Through ASTRA Youth our young members work towards rights of young people and other underserved groups. ASTRA Network together with ASTRA Youth believes that the EU has a duty and an obligation to address the issue of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We share your belief that it is important to create a strategy targeted explicitly at young people regarding improving their health. Young people's access to reproductive autonomy is restricted in ASTRA Network member-countries. Lack of mandatory comprehensive sexuality education, that leaves adolescents ill-equipped to confront adult reproductive life, and restricted access to youth-friendly counseling and other reproductive health supplies and services inhibit young people from leading informed, healthy reproductive lives.

In a number of countries of the European Union reproductive and sexual health of youth remains to be inadequately addressed by state policies and programs. Limited access to contraceptive services as well as sexuality information and education often leads to premature and undesired pregnancies and high numbers of abortions which are easily preventable if properly addressed. Many girls are still denied access to modern contraceptive methods because of financial inaccessibility. Premature and unplanned pregnancies constitute a major public health concern everywhere but especially in these European countries where abortion is criminalized. Accurate and scientifically-based sexual education and access to reproductive health services is also limited due to the growing influence of conservative forces. Moreover, sexually transmitted infections – including HIV/AIDS – rates have dramatically risen, especially amongst adolescents and women in some countries and experts predict that this crisis will likely spread to other CEE countries if there are no strong rights-based prevention programmes in place.

Regarding the crucial role of the EU in making healthcare a more accessible, high-quality, sustainable and safe service for citizens, ASTRA would like to encourage you to address the status and access to information of sexual and reproductive health for youth in Central and Eastern Europe as one of priority issues in sexual health strategy for coming years.

Looking forward to continuing fruitful cooperation with DG SANCO,

Yours sincerely,



Wanda Nowicka
ASTRA Coordinator

ASTRA members:

Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association, Armenia - Women's Rights Center, Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World", Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus, Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, Gender Education, Research and Technologies, Croatia - B.a.b.e. (Be Active, Be Emancipated), CESI - Center for Education and Counselling of Woman, Women's Centre for Sexuality and the Prevention, Research, and Combating of Sexual Violence - Women's Room, Georgia - Women's Center, Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim", Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, Latvia - Latvia's Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health, Macedonia - Sheltar Centar, Moldova - Reproductive Health Service Center, Poland Federation for Women and Family Planning, Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health, AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis, Russia - Institute of State and Law, Russian Academy of Sciences, ANO "Women's Health", Novogorod Gender Center, Slovakia - Pro - choice, Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning, Charitable SALUS Foundation, ASTRA ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: Center for Reproductive Rights, Albania, Romania, Women's Link Worldwide/Colombia.

ASTRA Youth members:

Armenia: Women's Right Center; Azerbaijan: Center Women and Modern World;

Azerbaijan: United Nations Interns Association (UNIA); Bulgaria: Gender Education, Research and Technologies; Georgia: HERA XXI; Georgia: Women's Center; Kazakhstan: The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim"; Macedonia: HERA; Poland: Group of peer sex-educators "Ponton"; Russia: Novogrod Gender Center; Ukraine: Women Health and Family Planning.